



Arthur Rothstein

Arthur Rothstein was born in 1915 in New York City to Latvian immigrant parents. He attended the Angelo Patri School in the Bronx and then Columbia University from 1931 to 1935. He developed an interest in photography while at Columbia University. He met Roy Stryker while at Columbia University, where Stryker was an instructor. As a senior in 1935, he helped to create a visual record of American agriculture that Stryker was assembling for a National Youth Project. Before the year was out, Stryker had hired the twenty year old at the newly created Resettlement Administration to establish the photographic laboratory and darkroom. Rothstein was one of the FSA's most productive photographers. The photographs he made during his five years with the Historical Section reflect the work of the agency. His first assignment was to photograph Virginia farmers who were being moved to make way for the Shenandoah National Park and to be relocated by the Resettlement Administration. In 1936 he went to Cimarron County, Oklahoma to cover the Dust Bowl. He took a photograph that was captioned "Fleeing a Dust Storm," showing a man and his two sons walking into the face of a dust storm. It became one of the iconic photos of the 1930s. The Bankhead-Jones Farm Tenant Act passed in 1937 and gave the agency a change of purpose as the Farm Security Administration, focusing on tenant farmers. Stryker wrote Rothstein that Beverly Smith was writing an article on tenancy at Gee's Bend, Alabama for an issue of *The American Magazine*. Starting in 1935, the Resettlement Administration had made loans and provided farm and home advice and instruction at Gee's Bend. Stryker thought perhaps a major magazine would be interested. He told Rothstein, "We could do a swell story; one that *Life* will grab." *Life* did not do a story about Gee's Bend, but an article by reporter John Temple Graves II ran in the *New York Times Magazine* on August 22, 1937. The article included eleven of Rothstein's photographs. The article relied on information from a report published by the agency. The article praised the agency's regional director and reported very favorably on work of the agency being carried out at Gee's Bend. The agency's work at Gee's Bend continued after Rothstein's visit, purchasing the Pettway plantation and adjacent farms and renting it to farmers. The next year, construction was started on a school, store, blacksmith shop and cooperative cotton gin. In 1939 Stryker sent Marion Post Wolcott back to the Gee's Bend to photograph the progress made by the residents. During 1940s, some of the families bought their farms from the government. Rothstein left the Farm Security Administration in 1940 to join the staff of *Look* magazine where he remained, except for his time in military service, until 1971 when the magazine ceased publication. In 1942 he was drafted and served in India, Burma and China with the U.S. Army Signal Corps. In 1946 he was the chief photographer for the UN Relief and Rehabilitation Administration in China. He returned to *Look* as director of photography and then worked for *Parade* magazine from 1972 to 1976. He also

published several books on photography between 1956 and his death. He died in 1985 in New Rochelle, New York.

Arthur Rothstein Bibliography

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Look at Us; Let's See; Here We Are; Look Hard, Speak Soft; I See, You See, We All See; Stop, Look, Listen; Beholder's Eye; Don't Look Now, But Isn't That You? (Us? U.S.?). William Saroyan, photos by Arthur Rothstein. New York: Cowles Education Corp., 1967.

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